

one of the conclusions reached, but of the plane on which the discussion is conducted. The background, not only of most mediaeval social theory, but also of Luther and his English contemporaries, is the traditional stratification of rural society. It is a natural, rather than a money, economy, consisting of the petty dealings of peasants and craftsmen in the small market town, where industry is carried on for the subsistence of the household and the consumption of wealth follows hard upon the production of it, and where commerce and finance are occasional incidents, rather than the forces which keep the whole system in motion. When they criticize economic abuses, it is precisely against departures from that natural state of things—against the enterprise, the greed of gain, the restless competition, which disturb the stability of the existing order with clamorous economic appetites—that their criticism is directed.

These ideas were the traditional retort to the evils of unscrupulous commercialism, and they left some trace on the writings of the Swiss reformers. Zwingli, for example, who, in his outlook on society, stood midway between Luther and Calvin, insists on the oft-repeated thesis that private property originates in sin; warns the rich that they can hardly enter the Kingdom of Heaven; denounces the Councils

of Con-
stance and Basel—" assembled, forsooth, at
the bidding
of the Holy Ghost "—for showing indulgence
to the
mortgaging of land on the security of crops;
and, while
emphasizing that interest must be paid
when the State
sanctions it, condemns it in itself as
contrary to the
law of God.⁴⁹ Of the attempts made at
Zurich and
Geneva to repress extortion something is
said below.
But these full-blooded denunciations of
capitalism were
not intended by their authors to supply a
rule of
practical life, since it was the duty of the
individual
to comply with the secular legislation by
which interest
was permitted, and already, when they
were uttered*